SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

STRICKLAND GILLILAN

Know Ye This Is Not A Present

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SUNSHINE
AND AWKWARDNESS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

INCLUDING FINNIGIN

INCLUDING YOU AND ME

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SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

BY

STRICKLAND GILLILAN

Author of "Including Finnigin," etc.

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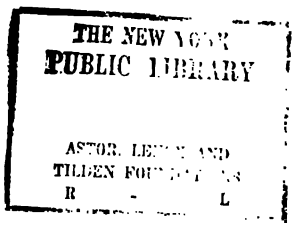

PREFACE

I have been giving a lecture entitled "Sunshine and Awkwardness" for a whole lot of years. It started by my being called on to recite "Finnigin to Flannigan," when I first wrote that thing, in the early spring of 1897. I felt so keenly my extreme gawkiness that I apologized for getting up. People laughed at my apology; and I, who had never heard of a monologue in my whole life, found that I was doing one! I let it lengthen.

Then my sensitive soul got busy and balked. I wanted to make people laugh with me, and I hated to be laughed at. I wanted to be taken seriously whenever I qualifiedly pleased. I wondered what to do. About that time I saw and heard Bob Burdette. I said to myself, "I can do what I want to. I can be as funny as the mischief and yet get myself taken seri-

ously when I want to, and thus save my own self-respect and not feel like an idiot or a clown. I have seen a man do it, and I can do it too. I shall reserve, as Bob did, the right to be serious at any unexpected moment."

So I tried. It worked pretty well, thank you. I found my stuff growing in length, and I built in little blending places to make it all sound as if it followed naturally. I let the audience get to thinking it was going to laugh all night and then I changed its tune. It was hard to do at first. But I found that if I myself were really in earnest the crowd would find it out and join me. I also found that a crowd that has been cleanly tickled is in the finest possible state of mind to be clearly taught. And I have had a perfectly ripping time ever since, with my folks-in-front. Except—

I said an earful then, son! Except was my middle name for several years. I reached a point that all young lecturers reach, where I thought I was the supreme test of a com-

munity's intelligence. If I shot my stuff at them and they didn't impersonate pretzels with the spasms of laughter I caused, they were fools. I was a sort of litmus paper thrust into their midst to test their mental reaction. If I turned blue, they were alkali, and if I turned pink they were acid. This reaction stuff may be exactly wrong, but you get the idea anyway.

So long as I had that idea I alternated between the happy heights and the dismal depths. I hated audiences and towns and committeemen and bureaus and oh, I don't know what all. I was a martyr loose in an unfeeling world, where only the smartest audiences took kindly to me.

Then I got wise by realizing I was foolish. I found that I had to make good separately and anew in every town I went into. I found that if I was nice and friendly and liked people and wanted just my hardest to give them a happy evening that wouldn't leave a bad taste in their mouths, I had a fair chance of getting

myself liked both on and off the platform not just off and on as I had been doing. Then I began being humble and fearfully sincere in my anxiety to mean something bright and helpful to a neighborhood. And it was easier to succeed. I quit being sore at the boys on the front seat, because the boys began to forget their peanuts and listen to me. I had learned "English as she is spoke," and had not always succeeded with it. I learned the human language as she is felt, and began to be understood.

In this book are the things I said when I began giving a whole evening, after I had been in the business a few years. This is a full lecture-course evening. When I speak at a Chautauqua after a prelude, I take an axe to this and give about half of it. When I come back the next year I give the other half. So if you hear me in the summer you'll hear, for the first two times in your town, just about the sum total of this book's contents, with many

embellishments and bringings-up-to-date. If I come a third and a fourth time you'll hear variations of a wholly new lecture, "A Sample Case of Humor," which is another story and another book-to-be.

I never heard of any one asking Mark Twain or James Whitcomb Riley who wrote the stuff they gave. But they ask me. I blush and say, "I done it myself." For like them, only infinitely less in my own estimation and that of two or three other ignorant folks, I write the things I give.

Now a gentle word about stories, son: Did you ever read what Kipling said about himself? This is it:

> "When 'Omer smote his bloomin' lyre
> He'd 'eard men talk, on land and sea;
> And what he thought he might require,
> He went and took, the same as me."

Me too, Rudyard. Whenever I saw or heard the nucleus of a good, applicable yarn,

PREFACE

I took the little germ and put it in the window box or flower-pot of my own imagination, took care of it until it blossomed, and placed it on exhibition. I have my own version of stories —therein lies the right I have to call them "my" stories. I don't believe anybody ever originated any story. But though the carpenter doesn't originate the lumber with which he makes a house, nobody hesitates to say that the carpenter is the maker of that house.

Now, here's the book. The lecture isn't always just like this, and it will change—oh, how it will change! But it follows the same general direction that my first attempt at lecturing followed—it is a sort of honest human document telling in the first person the story of most normal human lives. I love the lecture myself because a lot of good people have shown a strong liking for it, and their judgment is infinitely better than mine.

Yours garrulously,

STRICKLAND GILLILAN.

SUNSHINE
AND
AWKWARDNESS

Ladies and Gentlemen and Any Others Who May be Here:—

There are several of you present on this occasion, I notice, who are making absolutely your first public appearance—before me. Yet I hope that fact may not embarrass you any more than you can't help; and that by the time we have been together here a little while, by the time you and I have recovered to some extent from the shock, and by the time I have made a number of startling and, perhaps, entirely un-called-for confessions, we may feel as if we had known each other as long as is necessary.

SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

How Things are Named

This entertainment of which I am about to begin to relieve my system—liable to begin almost any time, now!—is not a lecture. It is called a lecture because—well, because it isn't one. So many things in this world are named that same way—according to some law of opposites or contraries that we can't understand or explain. For instance, when a baby wakes and cries in the night, we give it a glass of water and tell it to dry up; when we are engaged in the familiar process of robbing a chicken of all its clothing, we say we are dressing the chicken; and when two railroad locomotives come together we say it is a collision, while when two babies come together we say it's twins.

The Title Explained Away

This is simply a bunch of rambling, homely, every-day talks, by a rambling, homely, every-

day man. At least I think I am homely every day. I can't remember having had a day off. If this affair could, by the furthest stretch of the most flexible imagination, be called a lecture of any kind, it might just as well as not be called by a title an enemy of mine gave it, once, after he had watched it through to the bitter end. He said it ought to be called an illustrated lecture on "Sunshine and Awkwardness," with the audience illustrating the sunshine while I did all the heavy work myself.

A Disappointment

I have often suspected that the reason I took up with the sunshine end of this thing was that when I was a little boy growing up on a farm —now, what do you know about that! There's the same disappointment I meet every place I face an audience. I have been before thousands and thousands of audiences, from the ragged edges of Maine to the flea-bitten sands of the Pacific, and have broken to nearly every

audience, as sensationally as I could, the news that I had grown up on a farm, and I have never yet seen anybody look surprised at it!

A Sunshine Absorbent

But, as I was about to say when I interrupted me, while I was growing up on a farm I absorbed all the sunshine I could. I used up all the sunshine they had in that vicinity that wasn't needed for the other vegetation. I did this by inserting as few obstacles as possible between my somewhat skimpy anatomy and the sun. To be perfectly clear in my statement, so that he who reads may run if it will be any relief to him, I wore just as few clothes as the laws of my native state of Ohio would permit any human to wear and remain in sight. My costume, from early in May to the back end of October, consisted entirely of a pair of threadbare blue overalls, usually hung at half mast, with a hickory shirt, one bed-ticking gallus and a rag wrapped around one toe.

A Gallus Solo

Now there were two reasons why I wore just one gallus, in my exuberant youth: If I had worn two galluses in that community, at the same time, I should have been called a dude. And the other was that my parents were in very limited circumstances financially, and they found it a great deal easier to keep me in suspense than in suspenders. So they did.

A Freckle Trust

I started out every spring with about nine hundred and twenty-four freckles—now that isn't official. The official returns aren't in yet! —and I wound up in the fall with just one freckle. That is official. The freckles with which I opened the season looked like rust, and the continuous one with which I finished in the fall looked like a trust—it had absorbed all the raw material obtainable and was negotiating for more.

An Incurable Case

It was while I was growing up amid t luxurious and pampered circumstances that parents discovered, with some degree of alar that I had in me the microbes of newspap magazine and platform humor, and poet It worried them almost to death; for, althou you who have been watching me closely ha seen nothing to make you even suspect it, r folks were nice folks. And they didn't wa any of the boys to go wrong if they could p vent it. So they applied every form of ho treatment they knew—including the laying of hands!—to try to get this out of me, but t treatments were all total failures, and the c at length became chronic and incurable.

A Mother's Forbearance

Among the first outbreaks of what pro afterward to be the worst possible case of horriblest form of so-called humor that ou

to be punished with death by slow torture was once when my mother had just got through baking and churning. She asked me if I wouldn't take grandma's bread and butter over. I told her I'd take her bread, but I wouldn't but 'er over. And in spite of that, my life was spared!

Some Sincere Buttons

And then there was my little brother Ernest. Why, to live in the same farm-house and grow up on the same farm, in the same township, quarter-section and range, with him, was a liberal education in humor. Ernest was the most peculiar child I have ever experienced. He had all of those things called "marked peculiarities," and then he had a whole lot of other peculiarities that we didn't have time to mark. He was all peculiarities, Ernest was.

One of the most remarkable things about my little brother Ernest was his appetite. He never got hungry at all. He just stayed hun-

gry. And you had to be mighty careful what you left lying around if you ever wanted to see it any more. Well, one time mother had been to town and bought a whole lot of things for the farm-house and had left her packages lying all about the sitting-room while she hurried out to cook dinner, so we could go out and do our seventh or eighth half-day's work that day while she staid in the house and did her tenth or eleventh. Ernest was snooping around among the things she had brought home. He found a card of buttons. Now, as nearly as I can recollect, that card was about six inches square, blue on one side and white on the other, as so many button cards are built. On the blue side were sewed three dozen of those old-fashioned white glass shirt buttons—about as big as a dime or fifteen cents—in beautiful straight rows—straight as a gun-barrel.

Ernest looked at those beautiful straight rows laid out symmetrically across that beautiful dark blue buttonscape until, it being so

nearly meal-time, he lost control, absolutely, of that destructive appetite he always had with him. He started in to swallow those buttons one at a time just as fast as he could loosen them from the card. Toward the last, by hurrying some and taking both hands and some enthusiasm to it, he got such a motion on him that you could hear those buttons click against each other on the way down.

Mother caught him just as he had swallowed the last button and was wondering what he had better do with the card. Mother was awfully peeved, for she had been intending to use those buttons herself, that afternoon. Maybe not the same way. She punished Ernest just as hard as she could. She never punished any of us on an empty stomach. She always turned us over. She punished Ernest as hard as she could and Ernest cried as hard as he could, and said he was only in fun; but mother knew only too well that the buttons were in Ernest.

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Marketing Masterpieces

It was only a little while after I broke out with the poetry disease that I began worrying and fretting over the fact that the world was missing all these beautiful gems I was creating. I felt so sorry for the world that I could hardly keep back the tears. Once when my pity for the suffering universe had got entirely beyond my control, I gathered up an arm-load of the stuff I had been doing and carried it to the nearest town and showed it—I mean I started to show it—to a newspaper man. He looked at the verses as long as he cared to and at me as long as he could stand it, and then said:

"Boy, what makes you do this sort of thing? Aren't you feeling well?"

I told him I thought I was getting big enough now to be doing something to keep the wolf from the door.

"You've done it already," he said. "Just

take this stuff home and hang it on the door in plain sight and no wolves or anything else will bother you."

He said that and some other things that made me believe, almost as if he had told me, that he didn't want those verses, and I took them away from him.

That Insulting Mirror

But I had another errand in town—it was too far from our house to town to waste a whole trip on a piffling errand like that. This other job I had that day was nothing more nor less important, momentous, portentous and epoch-marking than the purchase of my biennial suit of store-clothes. There was a reason for calling this biennial. I got a suit only every other year, of course, like the other boys in that neck of the woods. Up to this time my folks had never taken me with them when they committed that outrage on me. Now, there are so many perfectly good reasons for not taking a

boy to town in daylight, when it is two years since his last suit of clothes, that I shan't explain it to you at all. They had always left me at home and bought those clothes by guess. And they were horrible guessers. Toward the last they had been making such a mess of this trying to fit me with a suit of ready-made hand-me-downs while I was nine miles away growing four inches that same afternoon, that the neighbors had begun to complain bitterly that I interfered with scenery around there.

The folks had grown so discouraged and downcast and disheartened about it they said they weren't going to try it any more. They were going to let me go alone, the next time I was due for a suit.

They did as they had threatened—let me go by myself for it. As I approached the door of that clothing "emporium," as it was labeled over the front elevation of this story-and-a-half sky-scraper—scared to death—stepping higher than a blind horse in a pumpkin patch,

and (with my eyes sticking out so far you could sit on one and saw the other one off—I was met by a wide gentleman with an eagle beak instead of a nose and a smile all over what was left of him. He told me he was glad to see me. I was surprised at that. I had never met the gentleman before and I couldn't see why he was glad. I had never met anybody who was glad to see me. But I've since that time learned more about the retail ready-made clothing trade, and it is all clear to me. It was nearly all "clear" to him, then. He went on to say he had a suit of clothes back there that he had been saving for me. I didn't believe that then, but I do now. He would have had that same suit yet, if I hadn't gone and taken it away from him myself.

While he was digging down into the very bottom of this tall stack of moth-eaten, superannuated relics where all these years—fifteen or twenty years at the very least—he had been so faithfully saving this suit for me, I amused

myself by looking about the room. I'd never been in a big store before, in all my life. Just across the aisle from where I stood, I saw the funniest thing I had ever seen. It was in some ways in the shape of "the human form divine," but not enough to hurt. It had on a pair of trousers that—well, to use a railroad man's description of those trousers, they were all right along the main lines, but they were sadly lacking in terminal facilities. They didn't make the right kind of junction either with the boots at one end or with the coat at the other. Although there were excellent switching facilities near the northern terminus. The coat looked like a narrow collar with sleeves to it. The boots were those wrinkled, squushed-up things that look like accordions, with mud on 'em. When I saw that thing standing there looking right at me, I laughed just as hard as I could, and so did it. And then it dawned on me that I was having my first look in a full-length mirror. I've never been proud since.

The Breaking Away

But there came to me a time such as comes to every other gawky, pigeon-toed, ungainly, self-conscious, supersensitive country lad whose ambition takes complete charge of him and leads him whithersoever it will, when the farm and I had to part. Now, we human beings are a queer lot of freaks, and we have a queer lot of habits. The habits have to be queer, for they were made to fit us—made to measure. And among the queerest of those queer habits is that of traveling through life looking backward in search of our happiness. Sitting always on the hind platform of the last car in life's train, wearing blinkers like a plow-horse, facing invariably toward the rear, never seeing any of the beauties along on either side the right of way until we are nearly ready to go around a sharp curve or into a dark tunnel. We never notice any of the beauty or sweetness of life while it is close, within easy reach and tender

touch. No, we're not quite intelligent enough for that, and maybe we never shall be. It is always in retrospect, from the next part of our life, when the best and the sweetest are gone forever.

Anyway, that was the way with my old home life and me, as it has been perhaps with most of you people who have broken that old home tie permanently and must be with the rest of you when that time of life overtakes you. And the memory of those days that seemed to me so much like a prison when I was in the midst of them with no hope of escape, has seemed to me a great deal more like my finest possible conception of heaven, as I have looked back at them through the "mist of years" that we read about, and sometimes through the mist of tears, that we *know* about. And this is the way that memory crystallized itself into words for me.

Now if you folks don't care too much, or object too violently, I am going to give you

this in dialect—not because I hate you for anything, for I don't; or because I love dialect for its own sake, for I do not, although I have lived in Indiana more than once. But because when I think of those dear old days down on that hilly, worn-out Southern Ohio farm and the sweet childhood associations that nobody ever has had world-wisdom enough to appreciate while they are present and passing, those memories fairly clamor to be allowed to talk things over with me in that same code of signals that we used instead of the English language. And here is the whole short, simple, unembellished story:

Me an' Pap an' Mother

When I was a little tike
  I set at th' table
'Tween my mother an' my pap;
  Eat all I was able.
Pap he fed me on one side,
  Mammy on th' other.
Tell ye, we was chums, them days—
  Me an' pap an' mother.

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Sundays, we'd take great, long walks
  Through th' woods an' pasters;
Pap he al'ays packed a cane,
  Mother'n me picked asters.
Sometimes they's a sister 'long,
  Sometimes they's a brother;
But they al'ays was us three—
  Me an' pap an' mother.

Pap, he didn't gabble much;
  Hel' his head down, thinkin'.
Didn't seem t' hear us talk,
  Nor th' cow-bells clinkin'.
Love-streaks all 'peared worried out
  'Bout one thing er nuther;
Didn't al'ays understand
  Pap—that's me an' mother.

I got big an' went away;
  Left the farm behind me.
Thinkin' o' that partin', yit,
  Seems t' choke an' blind me.
Course I'd be all safe an' good
  With m' married brother,
But we had to part, us three—
  Me an' pap an' mother.

ME AN' PAP AN' MOTHER

Hurried back, one day; found pap
  Changed, an' pale an' holler;
Seen right off he'd have t' go—
  Where we couldn't foller.
Lovin' streaks all showed up then—
  Ah, we loved each other!
Talked fast, jest t' keep back tears—
  Me an' pap an' mother.

Pap he's—dead; but mother ain't;
  Soon will be, I reckon;
Claims already she can see
  Pap's forefinger beckon.
Life hain't long—I'll go myself
  One these days eruther,
Then we'll have good times agin,
  Me an' pap an' mother.

Purtier hills we'll have t' climb,
  Saunterin' 'long old fashion,
Hear th' wild birds singin' round,
  See th' river splashin'—
If God 'd only let us three
  Be 'lone, like we'd ruther,
Heaven'd be a great ol' place
  For me an' pap an' mother.

College Days

And now, although this is going to surprise you folks within an inch of your lives, if you're kind enough to believe it without any evidence before you, I went to college awhile! I went until I had spent all my own money and that of my close friends who weren't too miserably close. It was while I was there that I tried to take lessons in elocution. But they didn't take. I broke all the chandeliers in the recitation rooms trying to give the regular gestures to a lot of cut-and-dried elocutionary spasms, such as "Barbarous Frietchie," "Paul Revere's Ride," "Sheridan's Ditto," "Give Me Three Grains of Corn, Mother," "Lasca," "Curfew Shall Not Ring This Evening if I can help it," and that other old familiar selection we used to grub out of McGuffey's Fourth Reader, "The Boy Stewed on the Burning Deck."

I am still scared about gestures. You have

probably noticed that I make most of mine in my pockets. I had the gestures scared out of me when I was little. I was the youngest of a large, long-limbed, muscular and impulsive family, and a great many gestures were made about our place that stopped when they reached me.

Some right forcible gestures, too. I was merely a sort of back-stop for gestures. I hated to see a gesture start. If I couldn't see its finish, I'd feel it. And then I was always deeply impressed and warned by the old story of the preacher who owned just two gestures—they were his whole box of tricks. One straight up, one straight down, following each other in regular succession and alternation, no matter what he was talking about. And once they "broke bad" for him. He finished and ruined a perfectly good sermon by saying, with an upward point, "When the roll is called up yonder, I'll," pointing downward, "be there." It put him plumb out of business.

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An Anti-Caruso Career

It was also while I was in college that I used to sing. I beg your pardon. I used to try to sing. I quit. I had reasons for it. So had everybody that heard me. I am what you might call a reformed vocalist. I tried ten years before I gave it up as an utter fizzle. Now, that ten years I squandered may seem to you a long time to find out one can't sing, and quit it. But it isn't long for that job. That's the slowest job there is—finding out one can't sing and quitting it. Why, just think a moment how long it is taking the one I made you think of just then, to find that out and quit! Any of you here can silently pick out—now, don't point! That would be nasty!—half-a-dozen anyway, right here in your home neighborhood, of those home-grown coyotes that think they are canaries. Some of 'em have been yowling around in this vicinity for as much as twenty years, and haven't found out

the truth yet. And there's no way to stop 'em unless you kill 'em. And that isn't right. It is nearly as bad to kill anybody like that as it is to kill a person!

I found out three things that made me quit: First, that I couldn't sing; second, that it takes two things—voice and ambition—to make a real singer; I had only the ambition—I had no voice in the matter; and third and most important was the discovery that a flexible voice doesn't always go with a "rubber neck." And then I quit. But I made the usual number of breaks in public before quitting. Why, I used to have a sneaking suspicion—to say nothing of a haunting fear—that maybe the man who wrote that beautiful poem beginning "Break, break, break," meant something personal by it. I thought sure he had heard me somewhere. I didn't see how else he ever got that idea of one break right after another all the time.

I used to make noises in a church choir. I did that for four weeks before they found out

what was the matter with the music. They thought all the time that something had got stuck in one of the organ pipes. That was the first time I had known I could throw my voice. If I had known it before, I'd have thrown it away. But it all came out the first time I was called on for a solo. You can see how it would be then. No use to try to conceal it any longer. They caught me with the goods on me.

Church Choiritis

It was one Friday night at choir practice, and we were howling and gouging and thumping away on one of those mussed-up anthems, entitled "There is a Gate That Stands Ajar."

You know how they build those anthem things. You've seen 'em do it. You just take any little sentence, it doesn't matter how long or how short it is—just so it's a sentence. And figuratively speaking you run it through a sausage-mill or a fodder-shredder and cut it all up

into little fragments. Then you take those giblets and put 'em back together again, just anyway at all, so they are tother end to and don't make any sense, and then you do it over again. You keep on mangling and pulverizing and vivisecting that poor inoffensive sentence that never did you any harm in its whole life, until its best friend wouldn't recognize it if he met it in the big road, in daylight. And when you've been at this about eleven and a half minutes by the clock, until the whole choir has begun to turn purple around the gills and gasp a little and show signs of lung-failure, you get together with one final spasmodic, heroic, over the top effort, with what breath you can scare up among you, and say, "Ah—men—!" just as hard as you can. And that's an anthem. It's just a scrambled hymn, that's all. Anyway, that is the way that they had erected the one we were teasing that night. And the leader of this choir turned to me with a look on his face of a man who has been suspecting something

for a good while and is about to find out the truth, and said: "Will you kindly take this first solo part?"

Well, I certainly did hate to do it. For I knew what was wrong, and I knew what would happen if I did it. Like other poor singers, I wanted to stay in the choir.—Now that snicker of yours was a direct insult to somebody in your neighborhood!—But he was running that choir. I had to obey orders. So I took that solo. I had never been exposed to a solo before in my life. I broke out with it right away. I had it bad. I hadn't got to the end of the first line of that "There is a Gate that Stands Ajar" before the leader called out in a loud and agonized tone of voice, "Hold on! ! !" Now, that surprised me a whole lot more than anything I had ever heard. The little I had learned about music was the time-marks. And I know as well as you musical high-brows know, that when you have a coal-black note on the lower end of an upright stick, and a couple of

narrow flags on the upper end of that same stick, and no period after it, you have no business holding on.

But he was running that job. The old choir wasn't mine. So I held on like a bull-dog or a mud-turtle. And it wasn't more than half a second more before he called out a whole lot louder, "Let go! ! ! ! !" And I did. Then I asked him why in the world he had stopped me that way before I had a good start, and he said, "Anybody who had good sense ought to know that no gate could stand a jar like that."

A Regular Quartet

But I used to belong to a college quartet. Now, I'm not bragging about this. I say it in abject shame, as anybody should who owns up to having belonged to a quartet or any other criminal organization. I used to think maybe ours was the worst quartet there could be. But I've since heard quartets that cheered me up, no end! I know now that ours could have

sung ever since then and got worse every appearance and never missed a date. But I've always held firmly to the belief that ours *should* have been the worst. Nothing has ever shaken my faith in that. There was no demand for a worse one. They never invited us back anywhere. They used to dare us back, but they couldn't fool us. We knew what they wanted.

I don't know whether you folks ever thought of it this way—maybe you didn't. But there are remarkable points of resemblance between a male quartet and a baseball outfit. There must be in each organization, as anybody knows, a first and a second base. Our male quartet carried this comparison a great deal further than that. We nearly got into the national league. They did let us into the Epworth League once for fifteen or twenty minutes! Our music was never catchy and we never made a hit because it never was pitched right. And we never succeeded in getting properly through a score because we made so

many errors on runs. We had plenty of speed but no control. And the kind-hearted but impatient public supplied us with a short stop. In fact, there was no field for us, although we batted around a great deal. And the angry audience gave us a home-run every place we sang!

The first place we tried to sing publicly was at the Methodist Sunday School in the college town where they were letting us stay temporarily. The superintendent of the Sunday School had told us himself that—well, I found out afterward that he had been going to resign anyway—he told us we might go up and close the Sunday School. We did! We cer-tainly did!

The next effort we made was a serenade under the windows of some people we were mad at, out in the part of town where there was no police protection. We made our customary set of noises there for nearly an hour without any interruption at all—they didn't

even shoot at us!—and we thought we might be improving. But next day one of the boys found out that the folks had moved away the week before.

There was a red-headed fellow in our quartet. He was the reddest-headed person or the redheadedest person—now, just look what a break I've made! I intended to say that man was the reddest-headed person that ever occurred. But after looking over this audience I can't make the statement at all! I can only say, now, that he was the reddest-headed person I had ever seen at that time. He was so red-headed that—well, you can't believe everything you hear, but they told me he had to wear an asbestos hat. The fire insurance companies raised the rate on every frame house he got a room in. They just kept him moving all the time with the hose-cart about a block behind the express wagon hauling his trunk. He tried to take an egg-shampoo once, and you could smell scorched omelet for a mile. The

last I ever heard of him he was down in Washington, De Ceased, trying to get a patent on a fire-proof pillow-case he had invented. He was our second tenor and he came from Kansas.

Now the worst thing about him was not the fact that he came from Kansas—you know coming from Kansas is a sign of good sense if you come quickly and stay. But he had a real fault aside from his entirely unintentional sorrelness—you know a person may be perfectly red-headed and perfectly respectable at the same time. He was as absent-minded as he was red-headed—and that was his real handicap.

Why, he was as absent-minded as the man who had been out camping for several weeks among the wood-ticks, leeches, chiggers and other penetrating and investigative fauna, and the first morning he was at home for breakfast he poured maple-syrup over his ankles and scratched his pancakes! He was

possibly as absent-minded as the man you've all heard about who went home late one drenching, sopping rainy night, tenderly put his wet umbrella to bed and then went and stood in the sink all night. Maybe as absent-minded as the man who went out to milk late one night, hung the milk-pail up in the cow-stall and milked in his lantern!

Or he may have been—don't misunderstand me! I say he *may* have been, there's no affidavit goes with this statement—as absent-minded as the economical friend I used to have. Now, "economical" is the Sunday name for what was the matter with him. That word doesn't even suggest him. The word stingy is too weak a term. There is no word! If he had been going to "give until it hurt" he would have given a nickel and died in awful agony. Why, this man was so close he was almost adjacent! I say I used to have this friend. I haven't him now. He died of thirst right after they put a water meter in his resi-

dence. If they'd throw samples of medicine around town and leave any on his porch, he'd go out and take every bit of that medicine, according to directions, whether he had anything like that the matter with him or not—or whether he was even able to have it. But one time this economical person attended a public sale. You knew that without me telling you. You know that sort of hairpin never would miss a public sale. A public sale is a reunion of tightwads.

The Perils of Economy

I say this man attended a public sale and there he saw a golden opportunity to buy a fine set of false teeth, scarcely used, at a bargain. And he bought them. For some reason or another, those teeth didn't just exactly fit him in places. In his mouth, they didn't fit him at all. But he kept them, all right. He never gave anything up. He wore them around in his pocket. They chewed just as

well there as anywhere, and didn't hurt him so badly. One time he was wearing these misfit false teeth around in the hip-pocket of a pair of bargain-counter overalls that he had picked up at a sale somewhere. He had to keep picking them up all the time he had 'em on, too. They were about nine or eleven sizes too big for him. He had to gallus them up around his Adam's apple to keep them on. One day he was going around with this garment on, tuned up to concert pitch, the teeth in his hip-pocket, when he stepped on a banana peel and bit a wart off from the back of his neck! And you'd be surprised to know how it graveled him to part with that dear old seed-wart. He'd been using it as a collar-button for twelve years.

A Heart-Broken Author

But the worst thing about the absent-mindedness of this young fellow in our quartet was the way it would break in on our singing. We

would be working away on some piece we didn't know very well—and you wouldn't believe me if I told you how many pieces we didn't know very well. That was our specialty!—I say we'd be working away on one of those six or seven thousand familiar airs that we knew well enough to do anything to except sing them; we'd all be watching the words and music for fear we'd make some new kind of break, that is if there were any new kinds, when instead of singing what we were looking at he would sing whatever he thought about at the time! You can see that would get us into some horrible scrapes.

One time we were working away in public on a touching little ditty that used to be popular then—almost silly enough to be popular now, but not quite that bad—a slushy little ballad called, "Two Little Girls In Blue." His mind took an unscheduled excursion to his cyclonic home in Kansas and he got it, "Blue Little Girls In Two"! And then I

remember with painful distinctness one time we were giving what we called a concert, in public. I don't know what the public called it. I'd run a mile to keep from finding out their name for it. But that's what we were doing, whatever its right name is.

All of the audience was sound asleep except one man—stranger to us sitting about half-way down the aisle, sobbing and blubbering as if he had lost his season ticket. We boys were very proud for a little bit. But after the affair was all over, we drew cuts, as we always did, to see whose turn it was to go down the aisle and wake them and tell them they could go home now. I got the short and unlucky one that night. As I wandered along the aisle on that dangerous errand, risking my life every time I got anybody wide awake, I couldn't resist the temptation to lay my hand on the arm of this poor fellow whose cheeks still glittered with his honest grief. I said, "My brother, you seem to have been deeply affected by our sing-

ing!" "Yes," he sobbed bitterly, "I wrote that piece!"

But even now,

My voice is like the filing of a saw;
  My friends flee when I agitate my jaw;
I can empty any room with my rusty basso boom,
  And my vocalizing breaks the nuisance law.
But there's one—she's pretty, too; and as wise, some ways, as you,
  Who thinks my voice the finest in the land—
She comes with fist in eye begging, "Papa, baby bye!"
  When the sleepy-man is scattering his sand.

When the evening romp is winding to a close
  And my little baby's cheek with laughter glows,
When her night-gown from the press has replaced her daytime dress,
  Then the little darling rubs her eyes and nose;
She comes with dimpled hands and in mute appealing stands
  As she says: "I dot some somefin' in my eye!
Take me up a 'ittle bit, 'cause I'm sleepy I can get,
  An' O p'ease, sing to me, papa—baby bye."

Yes, my voice is like the filing of a saw,
And my friends are fewer when I use my jaw;
I have emptied many a room with my raucous basso boom
And my vocalizing cracks the nuisance law.
But while that one, sweet and true, thinks my voice as good as new,
I'll not envy any singer in the land;
For she comes with fist in eye, begging, "Papa, baby bye,"
When the sleepy-man is scattering his sand.

Just Among Us Parents

But that was when my children were real small. Just as soon as they got big enough to have what people call "an ear for music," that all had to stop. The only way I could put a child to sleep after that was to hold it by main strength while I sang one verse and tell it if it didn't go right to sleep I'd sing the next verse. It worked just like morphine or knock-out drops. One time when I had put one of them to sleep by that or some other Ladies' Home Journal recipe, I had lugged her up-

stairs to her own room and was sitting beside her bed—you know that white iron one, with the railings at the sides that you can let down if you want her to fall out in the night, and the brass knobs on the posts—sitting in an old busted down rocking chair that had got-to-looking so ornery downstairs that we had carried it upstairs out of sight, but went right on using—sitting there holding one of her sweaty, dimpled fists in one of my big paws, looking at her flushed and sleeping face, gathering therefrom my stock of patience and courage and strength for the next day's work and strain and anxiety—now, some of you folks know just exactly what I'm talking about. The rest of you think you know, but you don't! Not through lack of attention or intelligence—you are giving me the one and you have plenty of the other. It is only that life hasn't yet prepared all of you to understand this.

Unless you have been in the midst of that sacred, lumpy-throated moment, right after the

little thing drops over the edge into the depths of dreamland, when your feelings have changed in less than the twinkling of an eye from peevishness to something so nearly worship you couldn't tell the difference if you tried—unless you have been in the midst of that wonderful moment with your own child, you don't know what I'm talking about now, any more than if I were talking in ancient Sanskrit and saying it backwards.

This is something you have to know with your heart, after you have lived it. With your head alone you couldn't understand this in a million years; and never in a million lifetimes even with your heart unless it had come into your own life. Those of you who love babies know that there is nothing else in all this world so indescribably, so unaccountably pathetic as the face of a baby when it's asleep! You've noticed this. No matter how full of fun and frolic the little thing may be from morning till night, running from one bit of

trouble to another—in a hurry to get into the next scrape—getting hurt every few minutes, falling off of everything but the ceiling—the very instant sleep drops her soft veil over the waxen lids, there is that touch of inevitable and ineffable pathos! We know not whence it comes at dark, we know not whither it flees at dawn—we just simply, stupidly, humanly know: "There it is again!" That's all we know about it. But—say, folks, I don't believe we'd be making any bad mistake if we went right straight ahead out of the depths of our ignorance and took a chance on thanking God for that bit of tenderness; for I believe as much as I believe you and I are here right now for a common purpose—a lyceum entertainment and uplift—that He sent it, intending to make us say, "Well, if that little rascal is as much of a pest tomorrow as she has been every day now for a week or two, I'm going to see if it doesn't help matters some, at our house, if I'm a little better myself." And as that

thought came to me, these lines came right along with it:

Sleep, little baby, sleep!
  Thy father is watching near.
His hand on thine is love's own sign
  That thou hast no need of fear.
In the years to come, when thou hast thine own,
  When there's never a heart-beat free from fear,
Thou'lt then recall thy youth, and all
  The love of a heart no longer near—
Sleep, little baby, sleep!

But before I could get out of the room to hurry to my desk and write down those lines that had come as an inspiration, I noticed the little thing stirring uneasily in her sleep. Her lips were moving. I heard the rustle of a whisper. Was she communing with the angels while she slept? The words I caught as I bent low above the snowy pillow where lay the golden ringlets and the rose-bud lips were:

"Daddy, scratch my back!"

Now, that was an awful jolt to you, I know,

but I can't help it. It shocked me just as much, at the time. For then I had no more sense than you had just now! Not a bit! I was actually expecting something angelic from that young one of mine! But why should I have expected it? She was my child! What makes you and me be such dupes as to expect our children to be angelic? Where would the poor little things get it? Not from us, goodness knows! I'll tell you right now that if ever your child or mine shows any signs of being angelic and keeps up the performance very long, you may begin gravely to suspect that the law of heredity has been either repealed or declared unconstitutional. It keeps you and me—saying nothing about any absentees—clear up to our level best and then some to be half way wise enough and good enough to be the right kind of parents for plain, ordinary, human children.

Parental Infatuation

But did you ever notice that when you are at a public entertainment where children take part, no matter whether you are acquainted in that neighborhood, if you sit up close to the platform where you can let an eye ramble around over the congregation or the audience or whatever you call it you can pick out with deadly accuracy the parents of whatever little rabbit is up there spouting at the time? Ha! You can do it, can't you? You don't even have to look for a family resemblance. All you need to do is to squint around till you locate a couple of necks about nine feet longer than any other necks in the place, and—you've got 'em! Those are the parents. You couldn't miss 'em in a thousand years. But did you ever stop to figure on what it is that stretches those necks that way? Do it right now! It's father- and mother-love, which is the finest thing in this whole world. It has

to be. For it is the highest and purest and truest earthly type of that great big infinite Father-love that we all have to cling to and depend upon now and forever and forever and forever more. So let 'em stretch!

And an old friend of mine who had no form of culture except agriculture, but whose heart was located exactly where all real parents' hearts are located, told me how he felt and what he thought one time when he saw his own little tad take part in a program. And that old hardboiled ignoramus came so nearly feeling and thinking exactly as all regular parents feel and think under similar circumstances, that I saved what he said and took it home with me and pickled it in a home-made sirup of rhythm and rhyme, so that if ever I happened to drift into this town of yours and meet up with you folks this way and nothing interrupted us, we could just talk it over, like the old neighbors we are. And this is what he said:

When Our Gal Spoke A Piece

I ben t' doin's off an' on,
  Like apple-bees an' spellin's,
T' quart'ly meetin's, public sales,
  Hangin's an' weddin' bellin's;
But nothin'—sence the shootin' scrape
  Down on Bill Jones's lease—
Hez worked me up like t'other night
  When our gal spoke a piece!

'Twuz down t' th' ol' frame meetin' house—
  They called it "childern's day";
Th' young 'uns done it purtnigh all,
  Except th' preacher's say;
An' that hull program wriggled off
  Slicker'n melted grease.
But th' place where I fergot t' breathe
  'S where our gal spoke a piece!

The sup'intendent spoke right up—
  I heerd him call her name!
An' there she come a trottin' out—
  T' others may looked th' same,
But they wa'n't nary nuther one,
  Not even Thompson's niece,
That looked wuth shucks to Moll an' me
  When our gal spoke a piece.

WHEN OUR GAL SPOKE A PIECE

Me an' my woman set down front,
  Right clost th' mourners' bench;
An' list'nin' to that young'un speak
  Give us an' awful wrench!
An' when we heerd 'em cheer an' cheer
  We set like two ol' geese,
Wipin' th' silly tears away
  While our gal spoke a piece!

'Twuz jest some little, easy thing,
  Like "Twinkle, Little Star,"
Er Mary's leetle cosset lamb,
  Er somethin' like that thar,
But 'twant no twinklin' starlight beams,
  Ner tags frum lammie's fleece,
That made us blow our noses hard,
  When our gal spoke a piece.

I haint ben what I'd orto ben;
  I've staid away frum church,
An' sometimes Moll an' me hez thought
  They'd left us in the lurch;
But—wal, we've kinder rounded up,
  An' let our wand'rin's cease,
Sence we wuz down there t'other night
  An' heerd her speak a piece.

As To Swell-Head

But you know the kind of egotism that makes parents think their own children are the crowning work of the whole creative scheme —you know parents really believe that the only reason there were any people in the world before their young ones was that up to that time the Creator was merely getting in practice on 'most any old thing—I say that sort of egotism isn't the kind that hurts anything. That sort only makes this world a sweet enough place for us to live in long enough to grow up to where we can start in to have good sense if ever we are going to have it. But there is another kind of egotism that we don't have to handle with soft gloves or call pet-names. There is a kind called "swell-head," and that's a disease! An awful disease.

One of the most remarkable things about swell-headitis is that the person with the least excuse for it has it the worst. Another thing

is that the person most worth approaching is the easiest to approach. It is the pin-head who puts a barbed wire entanglement of what he wants you to think is dignity, around himself. Don't let him fool you with that. That isn't dignity. That's self-defence. He knows instinctively that he won't stand close inspection.

Another thing about swell-head is that the emptier the head the more it swells. It's so much easier to pump up a football than a door-knob. And another thing still is that this disease is so intermittent! You can have it very badly one day, think you've entirely recovered the next day, take down the quarantine card, disinfect the place and fire the doctor, and the very next day be broken out with the terriblest case of it you ever saw! You never know when you're through with it or it with you.

But the most remarkable symptom of all, about swell-head, is that it is always the other person who has it. Now, every one of you

folks—bright as you are—began thinking of somebody *else,* just as soon as I said "swell-head," didn't you! Of course, you did. That's one of the symptoms.

It's a remarkable disease, I tell you, and neither you nor I can explain it. And lis-ten! I've been married so long, myself, that whenever there is anything I can't explain, I confess it. Every married man here knows he might just as well. It saves time, if not trouble. So I'm going to break down and confess to you right now, that every one of you has had this disease. You see, that saves you a lot of painful confession and doesn't hurt my feelings a bit.

But I'll play fair with you. I used to have that swell-head thing so badly, about the time I escaped from college, that I got to lying awake nights worrying over what should become of the world if anything happened to me! Isn't that pathetic? When you get that way, that's the limit. You can't have it any worse than that. I dare you to. Na-

ture won't let you. When you get about to that point of inflation Nature comes along with a cross-cut saw or a crow-bar or a coal-pick or some other delicate instrument like that, and punctures you. And when Nature operates for an aggravated case of swell-head, no anæsthetic is applied. You get all the agony that is coming to you then. And once when I had tumbled to the depths from the heights where I had had no business fooling around in the first place, I wrote this little thing that I wish you would all take home with you—not to apply to yourselves. Nobody ever does that, but—to your neighbor when he gets that way:

Egotism's Antidote

When ye kind o' git t' thinkin'
  Ye're th' whole endurin' thing,
When ye think th' world must have ye
  Same's a kite must have a string,
Then it's time t' fix fer dodgin'
  An' begin t' look around—

'Cause they's somepin' goin' t' hit ye
That'll surely take ye down.

When ye git t' livin', reg'lar,
'Way up in th' upper air,
An' when folks without a field-glass
Couldn't find ye anywhere,
Then it's time to git yer parachute
An' see 't it's workin' right,
While ye glance tow'rd terry firmy
Pickin' out a spot t' light.

'Cause most folks is lots like water—
Finds their levels off an' on,
Though they 'vaporate occasional'
An' we wonder where they've gone;
But they're bound t' light back somehow,
Fog, er rain, er coolin' dew—
An' when I say "folks," I reckon
That's includin' me and you.

And if there's anyone here who can't remember when he was a fool, he's one yet!

That Photographic Crime

But I think I think of something right now that will take the swell-head out of anybody

who isn't mildewed with it. And that is—if any of you folks, no matter how good-looking you are, or even how good-looking you think you are (and *isn't* there a lot of difference in some cases!) will just pause one horrified minute and think how your picture looks in that old "family group" you've got hid out, somewhere at home! There—I thought that would jolt you. Isn't that thing a fright though! Now, if you can take a good look at that bunch of scare-crows, in a good light, and stay proud —there's something serious the matter with you. Yet you wouldn't take anything in the world for that old picture—indeed, you wouldn't take anything on earth for that picture! You couldn't *get* anything for it!

THE FAMILY GROUP

I hain't a spark o' city pride—at least so people say;
I don't care who finds out my hair is full o' germs of hay;

SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

I don't care who discovers that I growed up on a
farm
An' hain't got ust t' street-cars ner that skeery fire-
alarm;
But one sad mem'ry makes me gasp like when I had
th' croup,
An' that's t' think how we-all looked in that ol'
fam'ly group.

T' start in with, they's none of us would had it took
that day—
Jist happened we was all in town, 'cause Bill was
goin' away
With his best bib an' tucker on; an' so he says t'
me:
"Le's go an' git a fam'ly group, like Williamses,"
says he.
O' course we all felt proud o' Bill, an' fell in with a
whoop
An' flocked right up them gallery stairs t' git that
fam'ly group.

Th' photo-grapher kind o' laughed when we went
flockin' in—
I've spent some years, in later life, a-figgerin' on
that grin.

THE FAMILY GROUP

An' Bill he bossed th' job because he was a-goin' away—
Talked up an' showed that pictur man he wasn't any jay.
Th' feller went an' hid awhile in some ol' smelly coop,
An' got 'is shooter ready fer t' take our fam'ly group.

He put ma in th' middle with pa squattin' by her side;
He dragged Mahaly out from where she'd snuck away t' hide;
He yanked our chins, he fixed our hands an' pulled our faces 'round,
An' handled us all over like he's buyin' us by th' pound.
Then went an' hid behint a rag an' give a little stoop
An' says "That's all—nex' Saturday." He'd took our fam'ly group!

I see it yit! Bill fixed up, lookin' like a full-blowed rose
Amongst a bunch o' rag-weeds; pa's a-wrinklin' up 'is nose;
Mahaly's finger's in 'er mouth; Moll's got a sheepish grin;
Tom's mad, an' I've got on some boots with awful wrinkles in.

SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

Ma's worried 'cause that head-clamp tilted up her
bonnet-scoop—
I'm sorry Bill suggested that we git a fam'ly group.

I dunno if that pictur man's in bizness yit or not,
But if he is, an' I can find th' one partic'lar spot
Where he's at work, I'll git a gun, and sneak away
some night,
An' when I find him, he'll skiddoo or him an' me will
fight!
I'd turn that weepon loose on him with one wild injun
whoop
And let th' sunshine flicker through th' man that
made that group.

Ma laughs about it, but she keeps it hangin' on th'
wall.
Mahaly's dead—her baby's there, a-growin' big an'
tall.
All of us is scattered out—some of us gittin' gray;
An' pa sets dreamin' on th' porch, through every
sunny day.
I guess God's gittin' ready fer t' make a gentle swoop
An' take us up t' where they'll be a better fam'ly
group.

Names Before and After

But speaking of the little things at home, I want to tell you folks the shortest story there is. Not the shortest article there is—don't misunderstand me. The shortest article there is is a poem I wrote not long ago, myself, by hand—almost entirely by hand. The title of this shortest-possible poem is "The Antiquity of Microbes," and the poem itself is:

Adam
Had 'em.

But the story I was going to tell you is this: Once upon a time there was a little baby who was called Henry;—until he was born, and then they changed his name to Henrietta. But for some reason or another, or without any reason—for parents aren't guided by reason. And don't you know we ought to thank the Lord every time we think of it, that parents aren't guided by reason. Why, if parents had

never been governed by anything warmer or sweeter or tenderer or holier than reason, you and I should have been carried off and drowned like superfluous kittens, when we were little. That's awful, I know, but it is true. It wasn't reason that made them keep us and be good to us and sacrifice their comfort for our comfort day after day, night after night, uncomplainingly through the years without any prospect of reward—no, that was the most unreasonable thing the world ever saw. There wasn't a symptom or a trace of reason in that performance. It was something infinitely more near the divine than reason—it was pure, unselfish love, directly from the only fountain head that pure unselfish love ever knew. And so, as I say, for some reason or another, or beyond and above and better than all reason the father of this little Henrietta proposition thought just as much of her as he had been planning to think of Henry; and this is what the silly old thing said about it:

THE GIRL-CHILD

The Girl-Child

'Course we'd figgered on a boy-child, same as people always does—
Baby-girls is jest th' uselessest they is er ever was.
Helpless when they're kids, an' helpless when they're middle-aged er old—
All th' fambly turns pertectors fer th' ewe-lamb of the fold.
Dassent ever pop th' question, even though she's lost in love;
Has t' set an' wait till some man labels 'er 'is turtle-dove.
Yit it wa'n't a boy, by gracious! when it come, th' other day,
But we've kind o' got a notion that we'll keep it, any way.

'Course 'twas dreadful disapp'intin' that it couldn't bin a boy,
An' th' tears we shed er swallered wa'n't no sparklin' tears o' joy;
But she's jest so small an cunnin', an' she cuddles up so sweet,
With 'er fists like velvet rosebuds an' 'er little wrinkled feet—

Clingin' close, jest like th' tendrils of th' mornin'-glory vine
As it clambers up th' porch-post on a piece o' cotton twine—
Never knowin' she hain't welcome as th' flowers is in May;
So we've somehow got a notion that we'll keep 'er, any way.

Then, ag'in, I thought o' mother—she was onct a baby-girl!
Ain't no tellin' jest which eyester-shell's th' one that hides th' pearl.
Who'd 'a' knowed when she was little that she'd ever be so great,
An' would make my dear old daddy sich a stiddy runnin'-mate?
Then th' one that lays an' snuggles with this bran'-new baby hyer—
Would my life be worth th' livin' if it hadn't bin fer her?
She was jest as pink an' helpless as this new one is, one day;
So it's mighty easy guessin' that we'll keep her, any way.

KIDS VS. KIYOODLES

KIDS VS. KIYOODLES

But some people would rather have a dog!

Why one time last summer or some other summer, neither you nor I cares when, I was travelling through Iowa, going from Ft. Dodge down to Des Moines in one of those inter-Reuben cars, when I noticed two women in the same car I was partly occupying. Now, I don't want to fool you into believing that it is anything remarkable or unusual for me to notice women somewhere away from home. I notice 'em, all right, wherever I go, and I don't care who knows it. I like 'em, and I don't care who knows that either. I always did like 'em. I began liking 'em when I was very small.

Why, when I was a little bit of a flannel-faced squawking runt that nobody else in the world would have thought anything but an unmitigated, unexpurgated nuisance, there was a woman—a good woman; one of the saints of

earth; and supposed to be in her right mind at the time, ready at any moment, if necessary, to lay down her precious life for my worthless one.

My mother was a woman! And so strong was my prejudice in their favor from the hour of my first acquaintance with her up to right now, that as soon as I had reached the age at which I should select someone to be more sacred to me than ever my own selfish soul's eternal salvation, I unhesitatingly chose a woman.

My wife is a woman! And when our oldest two boys reach manhood's years, they are going to be women too, for they are girls now and I don't care. But if my son grows up a sissy I'll break his neck!

So you see, there is nothing remarkable in the fact that I noticed those two women. They were the only ones in sight. The woman on the right hand side of the car was nicely tailored and coiffured, her hands showed the attention of an expert manicurist, her suit-case was plas-

tered all over from stem to stern on port and bow sides with foreign hotel labels, and her hair —well, whoever's hair that was she was wearing—was done up in these little—these little—oh, you know what I mean! They don't wear 'em now, but some years ago they used to wear sled-loads of them. These little—peroxide wienerwursts. Whenever I see a stack like that I smell a "rat"!

But the woman on the other side of the car was a totally different type of chromo. She wasn't so well dressed. She had on an old ready-made jacket suit that—honest to goodness that thing didn't fit her anywhere. That suit had been marked down—marked down! Why, somebody in the store that had had that thing wished onto 'em had got writer's cramp marking that suit down before they finally got shut of it—nine-seventy-eight, eight-sixty-eight, seven-fifty-eight—I don't know where they really did stop marking that thing down or why. If they had marked it down to one

seventy-two they could have knocked off two more dollars just as e-easy! You just couldn't have lost any money on that suit unless you had bought it. It had been kept hanging up at home a long time, too. There was a hiked-up place right below the collar, and the placquet of her skirt was gaping—m-m-mmm! And her hat looked like "something the cat had brought in"—wouldn't she have made a lovely cover design for the *Delineator* or *Vogue!* No, she wouldn't. But she made a better-looking picture to me than the other woman made. I'll tell you why:

The woman on the right hand side of the car held in her strong, loving, well-tailored "maternal" arms, lavishing on it all the loving tenderness and endearment that thousands and thousands of human babies are dying for the want of right now, one of those little, raveled-out-looking, white French poodles of the kind that always makes you want to fasten a long handle to it and wash windows with it.

And the woman on the other side of the car held in her arms a totally different kind of a bundle. Let's look at it! Wrapped up in one of those old-fashioned plaid brown-and-gray shawls—you've seen fifty thousand shawls of exactly that same weave and pattern; with most of the twisted fringe pulled off—just a few pieces hanging on by their eyebrows. And there were little burnt holes in the shawl—some of the older folks among you know how those holes got there. Away back when grandmother was kind of young herself somebody had put a lot of over-dry chestnut or hickory wood in the open fire-place—no, it wasn't that! It was right after they had put the new roof on the old corn-crib and somebody had put a whole armful of the old worn-out, dry white-oak clapboards into the fire, and they had popped all over the place. That old shawl was hanging over the cream-jar right there at the edge of the hearth, and got most of the sparks.

This woman held her bundle tenderly and carefully, and whenever a whimper would rise she would pull down a bit of that old family-keep-sake shawl and say little sweet, loving nothings to it—the kind you and I used to like to have whispered to us when we were better than we've sometimes been since. So I just looked at this woman all the spare time I had, instead of at the other one. For I believed then, and I'm still stubborn enough to believe, that God had guided that baby into its little poverty-stricken but love-guarded harbor, and that He hadn't had a thing to do with locating that pup!

I'm glad you feel the same way about it. And it isn't that we have anything against dogs, either. We just don't like to see a perfectly nice dog get in wrong that way. And seeing that you feel the same way on the child side of the proposition, I'm going to give you a sermon a little child gave me once. Don't let that word "sermon" scare you—it doesn't

sound like a sermon. I didn't know it was one till afterward, and the child never knew it.

When Papa Holds My Hand

I'm not a-scared o' horses nor street cars nor anyfing,
Nor automobiles nor th' cabs; an' once, away last spring,
A grea' big hook an' ladder fing went slapty-bangin' by
An' I was purtnear in th' way, an' didn't even cry!
'Cause when I'm down town I go 'round wif papa, un'erstand,
An' I'm not 'fraid o' nuffin' when my papa holds my hand.

W'y street cars couldn't hurt him, an' th' horses wouldn't dare;
An' if a automobile run agin 'im, he won't care!
He'll al'ys keep between me an' th' fings 'ith danger in—
I know so, 'cause he al'ys has, 'ist ev'ry place we been;
An' nen at night I laugh myself clear into Dreamyland

An' never care how dark it is, when papa holds my hand.

'S a funny fing—one night when I puttended I was 'sleep
An' papa's face was on my hand, I felt a somepin' creep
Acrost my fingers; an' it felt ezactly like a tear,
But couldn't been, for wasn't any cryin', t' I could hear.
An' when I asked him 'bout it he 'ist laughed to beat th' band—
But I kep' wonderin' what it was 'at creeped out on my hand.

Sometimes my papa holds on like I maybe helped him, too,
An' makes me feel most awful good puttendin' like I do.
An' papa says—w'y papa says—w'y somepin' like 'at we
An' God 'ist keep a holdin' hands the same as him an' me.
He says some uvver fings 'at I 'ist partly un'erstand,
But I know this—I'm not afraid when papa holds my hand.

As To Women

But as the little girl gets bigger, it doesn't have to be "papa" that holds her hand. "Papa" loses his job. Sometimes it happens that that is the one job at which "Everybody Works But Father." And as the little girl grows up through the other stages of hand-holding, she begins to take on all the other habits of the grown-up woman, including one you may, if you want to, call the "universal feminine habit." Now, you know as well as I do that that word "universal" is too big for any mere human to go slopping around with. Nobody can ever know how much it means. But when I wrote this thing, I was much younger than I am now, and I knew all about it. I knew everything then.

Oh, what a pity it is you couldn't have met me then! But you know as we grow older we grow less sure about a lot of things. The older we are the less we know for sure. That is an

awful prospect to hold out to some of you folks who don't know much now, but it's the best I can do.

At the time, I was doing newspaper work in Los Angeles and the Woman's Federation of Clubs had coagulated out there for its biennial meeting. The whole town was full of women. I stood on the corner of Second and Broadway and watched thousands after thousands of them drill by on the way to the club house where the trouble was going on, and I saw every mother's daughter and aunt's niece of the crowd do the same thing. I said to myself, "I've discovered something." I thought I knew everything, but to my surprise I saw even I could go on finding out new things. I ran up three flights of stairs to my typewriter —that, is; to my machine—and wrote this, which has been the main joy and solace of about seventeen thousand yellocutionists and a whole battalion of glee clubs ever since:

THE UNIVERSAL HABIT

The Universal Habit

I saw her go shopping in stylish attire,
And she felt
Of her belt
At the back.
Her step was as free as a springy steel wire,
And many a rubberneck turned to admire
As she felt
Of her belt
At the back.
She wondered if all those contraptions back there
Were fastened just right—'twas her unceasing care;
So she felt
Of her belt
At the back.

I saw her at church as she entered her pew,
And she felt
Of her belt
At the back.
She had on a skirt that was rustly and new,
And didn't quite know what the fast'nings might do;
So she felt
Of her belt
At the back.

SUNSHINE AND AWKWARDNESS

She fidgeted 'round while the first hymn was read;
She fumbled about while the first prayer was said.
Oh, she felt
Of her belt
At the back.

Jack told her one night that he loved her like mad,
And she felt—
For her belt
At the back.
She didn't look sorry, she didn't look glad;
Just looked like she thought "Well, that wasn't so bad!"
As she felt
For her belt
At the back.
And—well, I don't think 'twas a great deal of harm,
For what should the maiden have found but Jack's arm,
When she felt
For her belt
At the back?

Unsatisfied Curiosity

But for fear some of you may believe I'm an anti-suffragist or some other kind of lunatic,

UNSATISFIED CURIOSITY

I'm going to try to red-ink the account with the women folks by telling something on these men. You know woman is charged with having in her make-up all the curiosity in the entire solar system and adjacent territory. This isn't true. She has all she can carry—she isn't short on that. Far be it! But so has man all he can carry of it, and he's a better lifter.

I'm going to tell you a story of the most curious person I ever heard of and he wasn't a woman. He was one of those walking, living, breathing human interrogation points that simply has to know what is going on about him, especially if it's none of his business.

Well, one day this man with the ingrowing curiosity was riding along in a railroad train, sitting right behind a man who held on his lap a big—now there, I got that wrong! I started to say a big pasteboard box, but it wasn't a big box at all. It was a lady's hat

box and it wasn't over two and a half feet across. You know, there was a time when we thought a box as big as that was some box, but that was before they began keeping their hats in a piano box or a silo. . . . He was carrying a box about so big. It was a green bandbox with a green lid on it. The lid was tied on with eleven or twelve strands of good, stout twine —you know the kind of brown, glazed twine, you stop in and borrow at the express office when you are going to send something by parcel-post—that's the kind. That's what puts express companies out of business—somebody stringing them all the time. That string was criss-crossed right squarely in the geographical center of the lid, and tied in fourteen hard knots and then in a loop-knot so it would be easy to untie. And he held that box as if his life depended on it. He never let go of it—he never took his eyes off it. That is, both eyes. One eye watched the box, no matter where the other eye was working at the time.

His eyes were made that way, so he could carry a box and watch it and not miss any of the scenery outside. And there were holes punched in the lid of the box. Somebody had just taken his finger and shoved it down through the lid, like that, pulled his finger out —the same hole!—and then punched another one. The man behind watched the box, he watched the man, he watched the man watch the box, he watched the box get watched by the man. After awhile he happened to think:

"My goodness gracious, but I'm getting careless! That man is a plumb stranger to me, and he might get off somewhere with that box and I might never know what was in it!"

Just think of that—appalling thought! He might *never* know what that stranger carried in that box! So he got busy. He leaned forward and stretched up to the full extent of the law, and said:

"Ahem! Stranger, it looks as if you might have something in that box."

"Uh-huh, I have."

A few minutes' silence. The man felt very badly. Then he hit the stranger again, to see if he could shake anything loose.

"I s'pose it's something alive, maybe."

"Yeah, it is."

Another painful silence. The man felt worse. He tapped the victim in a fresh place to see if he would flow any more freely.

"I s'pose you got that lid on so it won't git out."

"Uh-huh."

The man was running out of patience. He used up all he had left by saying:

"I s'pose you got them holes punched in the lid so's it'll get air and won't smother."

"Yep, that's the idea exactly."

Now, that man *was* out of patience. He said:

"Well, would you mind tellin' a feller what that is in that box?"

"No, I wouldn't mind it at all."

Now, the man was worse than out of patience —he was just plain United States m-a-d mad! That was all. So he said:

"Well, what *is* that in that box?"

"It's a mongoose."

"It's a what!!!!!"

"It's a mongoose, I told you."

"Huh! It was nice of you to tell me, but I dunno any more about it than I did. What is a mongoose?"

"It's a little animal that lives in India and eats snakes."

"Eats snakes! Wow! What do you want with an animal that eats snakes?"

"Well, if you must butt into my business, I don't mind telling you that I have a brother-in-law at home that drinks a great deal, and every once in awhile he has an attack of delirium tremens, and we bought this thing to eat up the snakes."

"Well, haven't you folks got any sense? Don't you know that them snakes a feller sees

when he gets that way, ain't real snakes?"

"Ye-es! We know that. And this isn't a real mongoose, either."

Now, I know how you feel about that, but I can't help it. I'd like mighty well to go right on and be nice and tell you just what that really was, in that box, but I don't know myself. The man wouldn't tell me at all!

Jumping at Conclusions

I had a real reason for telling you that story —to teach you over again what you have all learned so often: that it doesn't pay to jump at conclusions, to use hasty judgment. It never pays to jump at conclusions. I used to have a dog that did that, and it fixed him, all right! That dog would jump at anything's conclusion, that went past him. A cow, or anything like that. He would wait till a cow got barely past him, then he would jump at her conclusion. And like other people who haven't sense enough to keep them from it, he would hang

onto the first conclusion he got hold of, whether it was the right one or not. You've seen people like that! Never right about anything, never doing any thinking for themselves! Why, this dog beat that kind of folks all to pieces. I've seen him go around and around half an hour at a time, sparing no pains or effort to try to reach his own conclusion.

But I lost him because of that very habit. His name was August. He was given to me by a German friend of mine. He was a German poodle. That is, the dog was a German poodle. I named him August after this friend who gave him to me just before the assessor was expected. I was very fond of August. One time August was lying out in the middle of the road and a big, black, seventeen-hand, bad-dispositioned mule came by. August jumped at that mule's conclusion. And the next day was the first of September, because that was the last of August.

You know, I must have had an awfully reck-

less spell sometime ago—I told that story to an English tourist who was tramping about this country with a plate-glass window hung to one eye by a rope. He looked very unhappy over the story and said:

"Well, me deah fellow! What's the bally difference what time of the yeah it was when the bloomin' dog was killed!"

Just like that! That's as nearly as that feeble August-September wheeze got under his hide!

The Slandered English Defended

But do you know, that was mighty hateful of me to turn aside and take a gratuitous wallop at that Englishman, who wasn't harming me at all. But it's in our American blood! The English settled this country once and this country settled the English twice afterward. I think we're going to lose that prejudice now, by fighting in a common and righteous cause with England against the enemy of all civiliza-

tion. But we talk always as if all the English were the kind of people who can't see a joke. Anybody with good sense or the ability to think knows that isn't true. We talk also as if everybody who couldn't see a joke were English. That is just as foolish and untrue. *Lis-ten:* There are American-born boneheads-de-luxe! Born under the fluttering folds of the Stars and Stripes and yet couldn't see a joke in broad daylight with the help of a lantern or a microscope. Let us sob together a few minutes—the case deserves it. We sob a lot over things that aren't half so serious.

Americanus Boneheadus

Why, down in Baltimore where I live, where the Star Spangled Banner that we all love—and none of us can sing—was written, we have that kind of critters. Once just before starting out on one of these romps of mine I went into a big department store—one of the kind that miraculously and with un-

canny cleverness manages to have in stock everything on the face of this planet except the one little measly thing you went after in a big hurry—how do they do it! They just sold the last one, but they've ordered some more. Isn't it comforting to know they've ordered some more! I went up to the United States senatorial looking man who was floor-walking, and—but that man wasn't a United States senator, really. I found out afterward that he was a perfect gentleman. Yet he looked as much like a United States senator as anybody dare look and expect to hold a job. Seeing he looked like a senator I knew he was a questionable person, so I questioned him. I said:

"Where's the gents' furnishing department?"

"Back up that stairway and turn over two aisles."

I wouldn't do anything of the kind! I

wasn't going carrying on that way in his place. But I thought maybe I knew what he meant, so I went up that stairway face-first, as I nearly always do among strangers if I am watched closely, and went over past the end of a couple of counters. Another blank face shot up before me like a jack-in-the-box, and said:

"Something for you, sir?"

I said, "Yep, I want to look at some union suits."

"In underwear?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "a hat."

Only a little while before that I had rushed into another department store for some home shopping I had been forgetting every day regularly for a month—that's the way with men. Aren't they the awfullest shoppers? They go shopping so listlessly. They shouldn't do it. They ought always to take a list with them. I approached a young lady salesman with her

hands draped over her digestion, standing there on her feet, doing nothing useful, and said:

"Where do you keep your kimonos?"

"For a lady?" she asked.

"No," I said, "for my uncle, a section-boss."

Only a few years ago I was out in Los Angeles, California. I hadn't been out there for five years. You know the population changes there every few minutes, and I didn't see why it wasn't safe for me to go back again if I wanted to. And another thing—when I lived there I wore a mustache that I think was about the reddest thing in captivity. It was so red that people a block away thought my nose was bleeding. I had shaved off that facial torch and thought I was completely disguised. So I went into a shoe-store where I used to have quite a large account, before I moved away and it wasn't any account. A young man came up to me and said:

"Hel-lo, there!"

I said, "You get out! You don't mean to say you remember me!"

"Remember you!" he snorted. "I never forget anybody's face that I ever fitted a pair of shoes on."

A Railroad Wreck

Just a few weeks before that I had been travelling along through the southern part of the state of Iowa, on an eastbound Burlington train, going about fifty-five knots per hour through the outskirts—now, about those outskirts. I'm not sure I know what I'm talking about. I was in the town only a little bit, and my attention was attracted to many other things. I don't really know whether that town had on anything except its outskirts. And let me tell you *now:* If that town's outskirts had been as thin and as scarce as some I've witnessed since, that train would never have whistled for it. It would just

have covered up the headlight and hurried by, blushing.

But as I say, we were going about fifty-five miles an hour through that little town when all of a sudden a brake-beam dropped down and ripped the hind trucks off of the mail car and away went that whole train in one mass of human and fifty-seven other varieties of junk. I was among and a part of said junk. Nobody was killed. Several of us were hammered up some. The man next to me in that train—one of the finest men and best companions I have ever known—was mashed into a jelly! The jelly was right in front of him in the dining-car and he was mashed right slap into it and didn't get hurt a bit. . . . I had a broken arm. Just a slight crack—only about fifteen hundred dollars' worth when we settled. We were lying along —did you ever notice that when anybody gets hurt in any kind of public conveyance he starts right in lying? You can't believe a thing he

says till after the company has settled with him.

I say we were lying along on piles of hay and Pullman blankets when the folks in that big Iowa meadow came running like quarter horses to "pass this way and view the remains." They thought a whole lot of us had been pulverized for their amusement; but we hadn't. We were awfully sorry, on their account, and apologized profusely to them and told them with a few rehearsals we should probably have done much better—we had just got that thing up on the spur of the moment. We'd never been thrown together before anywhere. You see, we wanted to make good so that if we should ever hold another wreck there they would all buy season-tickets and come. One old gentleman with a big straw-hat and a set of maa-maa! whiskers came up and looked compassionately down on poor, broken me and said:

"Was you hurt in the coach, mister?"

"No," I answered apologetically, "I was hurt in the elbow, but I came mighty nearly being hit in the vestibule."

The High Dive

Over in my own native state of Ohio, a few winters ago, I was sitting at the supper-table one night beside the young man who had charge of the entertainment course in that town, when I said:

"Oh, by the way, I wish you'd have one glass of water out on the stage tonight, will you?"

"To drink?" he inquired.

"No, indeed," I replied indignantly, "I make a high dive in the second act."

The Shocking Verse

And then you folks know that there is nobody in all this world mean enough to try deliberately to sneak a joke into a piece of obituary verse. That is about the last thing on earth that should be given a hypodermic

squirt of hilarity or frivolity. But one time when I was editing a paper down at Richmond, Indiana, there were some folks who came in—the kind of folks who never smiled voluntarily in all their born days. You know the kind. The sort that infest in small numbers every community, who mistake their own stupidity for seriousness. Not quite enough home above the eyebrows to permit them to see the merry jest that makes others smile, so they remain solemn.

They should be approached "more in sorrow than in anger." We will all admit there is profound seriousness in their case, and let it go at that. . . . I've always had a prejudice against that kind of folks because I got whipped on account of one of 'em once. I was taken to church when I was a little bit of a tad down in Southern Ohio where there was an old-fashioned preacher that didn't know a thing.

Now, when I just mildly and plainly state

that he didn't know anything, I have understated the case—I have promoted him. He didn't even suspect anything. And right in the middle of the service that old man said something that made me cackle out loud in meeting and get whipped when I went home. You'd have done the same if you had been there and heard him. You don't know what it was! He called a sepulcher a sel-pucker! Now, if any of you folks in your most hilarious moments can think of a funnier word than sel-pucker, go to it! I can't . . . But those people who had brought in those obituary lines had that same sel-pucker type of a sense of humor. The first two lines scared me nearly to death and the next two nearly gave me hysterics. I'll tell you what they were, and you'll get the same shock I did:

Dearest grandpa, how we miss you;
Miss you, Oh, we cannot tell!
Yet we hope some day to meet you,
Yes, we'll all meet you in heaven.

You see, they plumb spoiled that rhyme, but look what they pulled grandpa out of! They gave the old rascal a transfer, just in time!

Poetic Justice

But sometimes we smarties who go around making fun of other people because their sense of humor isn't just exactly like ours—we get caught and punished—don't we *just!* One time—and I certainly do hate to tell about this, for it hurts me even to think of it—I was going from Baltimore to Pittsburgh on a Baltimore and Ohio train. Just as we were getting close to McKeesport a man got up from his seat and went across the aisle and slid into the seat beside another fellow. The man who had gone across the aisle braced himself as for some awful ordeal, took in a deep breath till he looked like a pouter pigeon, and said:

"C-c-c-can y-y-you t-t-t-t-t-tell m-me wh-

what t-time this t-t-train g-gets to P-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-Pittsburgh?"

The other man didn't answer him. He just looked scared at him. I couldn't imagine what was wrong. I saw by his face that he heard all right. It was too deep for me. I didn't see why the man didn't answer before something broke. I thought that fellow would die or explode or something from the pressure he was carrying. But he didn't. He was a gritty chap. He took in another breath like that first one, cranked himself up, cut out the muffler, threw himself into low gear, stepped on the accelerator, changed the mixture a time or two, went from magneto back to battery, and sounded as if he had three dirty spark-plugs and mud in his timer. He said it again. But still the man didn't answer him. He looked worse scared than he had looked the other time, and crawled out past the other fellow's knees—I wish you'd have seen the sprint he made for the smoking-car. You never saw such run-

ning. When he reached that refuge he slammed the door behind him so hard he cracked the glass in it.

And this other poor chap—afflicted, disappointed, dejected, went back to his own seat and slunk down in it so far he was sitting on his collar-button, and heaved a sigh like the last suds going out of the sink. It was the saddest thing I ever saw in my life. I couldn't stand it. I reached up in the rack for my hat, went across the aisle and said:

"Cheer up, bud. I couldn't help overhearing that question you murmured to that man who got up and went away from you, and I want to tell you that this train is due in Pittsburgh at 6:25, and she is running right on the dot, now."

He started to thank me. That was only a few years ago, he's probably somewhere thanking me yet. I went on to the smoking-car to find that mean man and have an accounting with him. I found him. I said:

"Look here, old top, why on earth, when that poor fellow back there nearly blew up trying to ask you something, didn't you say something to him—talk to him like a fellow-human instead of running off like a rabbit—hey?"

And that man said:

"D-do y-y-y-y-y-y-you sup-p-p-p-pose I w-want to g-g-g-get m-my b-b-b-b-b-b-block knocked off?"

To Prevent A Why Not

And now, just because if I don't somebody will ask me why I didn't, I'm going to give you the first thing I ever wrote that made the world sit up and deal tenderly with me. You've heard this, you've read it a thousand times. If you haven't I'm ashamed of you. Yet if I don't give it when I, the author, am there in person, there is always trouble, so here goes:

FINNIGIN TO FLANNIGAN

Finnigin To Flannigan

Superintindint wuz Flannigan;
Boss av th' siction wuz Finnigin.
Whiniver th' cyars got off th' thrack
An' muddled up things t' th' divvle an' back,
Finnigin writ it t' Flannigan,
Afther th' wrick wuz all on agin;
That is, this Finnigin
Repoorted t' Flannigan.

Whin Finnigin furrst writ t' Flannigan,
He writed tin pa-ages, did Finnigin;
An' he towld just how th' wrick occurred—
Yis, minny a tajus, blundherin' wurrd
Did Finnigin write t' Flannigan
Afther th' cyars had gone on agin—
That's th' way Finnigin
Repoorted t' Flannigan.

Now Flannigan knowed more than Finnigin—
He'd more idjucation, had Flannigan.
An' ut wore 'm clane an' complately out
T' tell what Finnigin writ about
In 's writin' t' Musther Flannigan.
So he writed this back: "Musther Finnigin:—
Don't do sich a sin agin;
Make 'em brief, Finnigin!"

Whin Finnigin got that frum Flannigan
He blushed rosy-rid, did Finnigin.
An' he said: "I'll gamble a whole month's pay
That ut'll be minny an' minny a day
Before sup'rintindint—that's Flannigan—
Gits a whack at that very same sin agin.
Frum Finnigin to Flannigan
Repoorts won't be long agin."

Wan day on th' siction av Finnigin,
On th' road sup'rintinded be Flannigan,
A ra-ail give way on a bit av a currve
An' some cyars wint off as they made th' shwerrve.
"They's nobody hurrted," says Finnigin,
"But repoorts must be made t' Flannigan."
An' he winked at McGorrigan
As married a Finnigin.

He wuz shantyin' thin, wuz Finnigin,
As minny a railroader's been agin,
An' 'is shmoky ol' lamp wuz burrnin' bright
In Finnigin's shanty all that night—
Bilin' down 's repoort, wuz Finnigin.
An' he writed this here: "Musther Flannigan:—
Off agin, on agin,
Gone agin.—Finnigin."

The Reason In All This

And now for the last two minutes, *after* which you grab your hats and things and struggle for the door. I want to tell you the why of this thing I've been doing—the attempted humor I have handed out to you. It isn't only for the laugh you get out of it. That is a part of my aim, and a very legitimate part of it. But that isn't all. Humor isn't for its own sake alone. It is a means to an end. To run a whole one hundred minutes of humor with nothing else to it is as foolish as to coal up and water a big mogul engine, get up steam to the popping-off point and then run it back and forth along the whole length of the division without hitching anything to it. Humor is not the gasoline of life—it is the transmission oil and gear-grease.

You have caught me now and then slipping in a sermon between the laughs. I didn't care if you did catch me at it. Mother wanted

every one of her big ugly boys to be regular preachers. You know what those good old Christian mothers are, God bless 'em. But we couldn't all preach alike. Every human being is born into the world with the ability to preach the gospel in some way that no other human being can. If we could only find our own ways to preach what a world it would be! But we used to think all preaching had to be done the same way, and we wanted to please mother. One of the boys is a regular preacher and a good one. I am neither. I tried it once—one consecutive time, to preach the regular way. When I had finished, the choir arose bewilderedly to its hind-feet and sang, "Hallelujah, 'tis done."

And for once, the choir was right. I saw that if ever I preached it would have to be some other way. I couldn't do that kind. So this was the way that found me—slipping the sermons in between the laughs, so that maybe they might digest more readily and live

longer than any other sermons I could preach —little sermons so simple that I even understand them myself! And that is *such* a help!

For the purpose of humor is to foster in human beings that sane, wholesome philosophy or religion known as optimism. Now, optimism isn't what some people think it is. Some people think an optimist is that sort of thing that goes around grinning all the time like a Cheshire cat, saying, "Everything's all right, everything's all right," when half the time everything isn't all right. That isn't an optimist who does that—it's a cheerful idiot. There's a vast difference between an optimist and any kind of idiot. It takes intelligence of the finest, faith of the most sublime, sanity of the most complete to be a real optimist. Faith and intelligence and balance to *know* that although there may be heartaches today—and God who made us and loves us knows that some todays are just crowded with heartaches that nobody but an

idiot or a lunatic could laugh at at the time—though those things come and hurt as deeply as we think we can bear, those things aren't permanent—Oh, isn't it great that they don't last always! What a little of the sum-total of our life they form! They aren't terminals—they are only way-stations and whistling-posts and water-tanks on the way toward the great, big beautiful finish of things in God's own good time and perfect way—that He is saving as a glorious and satisfying surprise for us.

And the old woman who said the thing that supplied the text for my benediction that comes right now was the most perfect optimist; and she wasn't laughing a bit when she said:

TOMORROW

My life has reached the sunset way;
'Mid the twilight shadows deep
The tender love of my Father's voice
Is lulling my soul to sleep.
My empty arms are hungering
For the forms once sheltered there,

TOMORROW

But the Father has taken them all away—
They needed a kindlier care.

One night when my life was young and strong,
I was crooning a lullaby
To my sweet, wee tot three summers old,
When the baby began to cry
For the dollies my mother-hands had made,
And I soothed her childish sorrow
With the words: "Your babies are put away;
You may have them again, tomorrow."

And now, as I travel the sunset road
'Mid the twilight soft and deep,
While my empty arms are starving
For the forms once hushed to sleep,
My Father in love bends over me
And there's hope instead of sorrow
As He says: "Your babies are safe with me;
You may have them again—tomorrow."